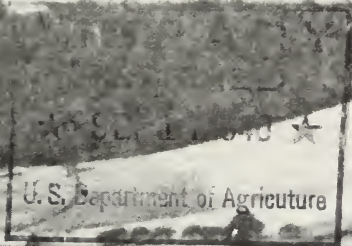


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# RURAL COMMUNITIES:

WHAT DO THEY  
NEED MOST?

This pamphlet has been especially prepared for use by discussion groups. Its purpose is to present, in brief form, some of the more important trends affecting rural communities, and some of the current suggestions for rural organization suitable to meet current trends. No statement contained herein should be taken as an official expression by the Department of Agriculture.

The following questions are discussed:

**What Do Members of Rural Communities Need?**

**How Have Modern Inventions Affected Your Community?**

**What Do Recent Developments Mean for Communities?**

**Should Communities Be Larger?**

**Should We Have Communities at All?**

**How Important Is Community Spirit?**

**What Are Practical Means of Community Organization?**

**How Can Modern Rural Needs Best Be Met?**

**Is an Organization Desirable for Making Community Policy?**

**How Can Individuals Pool their Ideas?**

**What Are Some Ways to Start a Community Organization?**

Copies of this pamphlet may be obtained free upon request addressed to the Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Other pamphlets have been similarly prepared and are similarly obtainable.

#### SUBJECT-MATTER PAMPHLETS FOR THE 1937-38 SEASON

DS-9 Taxes: Who Pays, What For?

DS-10 Rural Communities: What Do They Need Most?

DS-11 Soil Conservation: Who Gains By It?

DS-12 Co-ops: How Far Can They Go?

DS-13 Farm Finance: What Is a Sound System?

DS-14 Crop Insurance: Is It Practical?

DS-15 Reciprocal Trade Agreements: Hurting or Helping the Country?

DS-16 Farm Security: How Can Tenants Find It?

DS-17 The National Agricultural Program: What About Cotton?

DS-18 The National Agricultural Program: What About Wheat?

#### LEAFLETS ON THE DISCUSSION METHOD

DN-1 Suggestions for Discussion Group Members.

DN-2 Suggestions for Group Discussion Leaders.

United States Department of Agriculture

Bureau of Agricultural Economics  
In Cooperation With  
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## RURAL COMMUNITIES: WHAT DO THEY NEED MOST?

There are different ways of looking at the question, Rural Communities: What do they need most? First one might ask, What do you mean by the question? Do you mean, What do the people who live in rural communities need most? Or do you mean, What things are most needed to keep rural communities alive? For what purposes? In other words, what can the rural community do for its citizens that might not be done just as well or perhaps better without communities?

One way to go at the matter is to take up these questions in the order in which they were put down; to discuss first, what people in rural communities need, and then to see how their needs can best be met.

### WHAT DO MEMBERS OF RURAL COMMUNITIES NEED?

Let's take a look at today's chief needs of people in rural communities. What do you think of the following suggestions as to what is needed in rural communities?

1. Enough purchasing power to buy the necessities enjoyed by other people.
2. Electricity and other such ordinary conveniences of the city.
3. Roads, good throughout the year from main highways to the dooryards:
4. Schools that are as well staffed and equipped for rural needs as city schools are for urban needs.
5. Doctors near enough so that rural families can afford good health—likewise hospitals.
6. Churches with preachers who measure up to the spiritual challenge of country life.
7. Recreation programs of high quality and within the means of the rural family.
8. Efficient government at low per capita cost for services rendered.

How many of these needs are felt in the rural communities with which you are most familiar? What would you add to the list in view of their special circumstances?

If you do not think the needs mentioned above should be included, what kinds of services do you have in mind when you talk about what members of rural communities need most?

## HOW HAVE MODERN INVENTIONS AFFECTED YOUR COMMUNITY?

The next question is, to what extent can these needs of people in rural communities be met through facilities offered by their communities. As soon as one tackles that question it becomes clear that many needs which used to be met by the local community are being met today by organizations covering larger areas.

## HOW TIMES DO CHANGE!

Within the last two generations, modern inventions have changed our ways of getting about and keeping in touch with each other almost beyond recognition. One after another, hard roads, telephones, automobiles, parcel post, and radio have changed the nature of rural communities which were formed on a scale of distances that could be walked or covered conveniently by wagon or buckboard.

Take a large number of things for which people go shopping. Today, instead of relying entirely on the cross-roads store, the whole farm family pores over the pages of the mail-order house catalogue. Local craftsmen, such as blacksmiths, have found that farmers telephone to machinery dealers in the cities for repair parts and drive 75 to 100 miles for these ready-made pieces in emergencies.

Roads are built increasingly by the county and the State. In many areas, high schools are planned today on a district basis because the community unit is too wasteful. Home-made sermons must now compete with the radio brand; poverty and decline have caused the decay of more than half of our country churches. Visiting is no longer done at Sunday dinner with neighbor Smith; and even threshing meals are arranged at the village restaurant! Today, young people whose parents got their recreation by buggy-riding into the village think nothing of driving to the county seat or clear across the next county when they

are going to the movies. County and home agents plan a good part of their work in terms of county committees; poultry growing, dairying, program planning, A. A. A., 4-H work, Home Councils, and other activities in the wide range of extension projects developed to meet the varied needs of farm people.

### **MILES OR MINUTES?**

A recent State study has provided some figures on the changed relation between time and distance in rural communities. Families that had lived on farms for the 25 years from 1905 to 1930 were asked about the cost to them, in minutes of time, of going to school, grange, church, bank, lodge, hardware, drug and grocery stores, and the like. The replies showed that while it took 1,000 minutes in 1905 to reach these institutions, in 1930 it took only 276 minutes. When measured in miles instead of minutes, the bank, the church, and the grange had changed very little in their distance from the homes of the families who went to them; the time required to go, however, had been cut about 70 percent. While the average distance to the school had increased 70 percent during the period studied, the time required to go and come had lessened by about a half. Likewise, distance to shipping points and livestock markets as measured in miles had increased about a half while the time was lessened about 65 percent.

To what extent have changes in transportation and communication affected ways of meeting community needs in your neighborhood?

### **WHAT DO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS MEAN FOR COMMUNITIES?**

Opinions differ widely as to the proper answer to this question.

#### **SHOULD COMMUNITIES BE LARGER?**

Some people say communities must be larger. They say everything points in the same direction. Now that people can get about faster, communities should be based on how far you can go in a short time with an automobile rather than how far your parents could go in a short time





in the horse and buggy days. They say, a one-room-school community is out of date no matter from what point of view you look at it; modern life is actually organized on an automobile-sized scale, and our real trouble is that we don't or won't recognize it.

#### **SHOULD WE HAVE COMMUNITIES AT ALL?**

Other people say that the viewpoint just expressed shows that the whole community idea is out of date. Just because people have automobiles and ways of getting about, they go to one town to do their shopping, to another to go to the movies, to another to sell their produce. This is an age of specialization. If you look at the rural organizations that are most alive and have the keenest membership today, they continue, you'll find that most of them are special interest organizations, established to do just one thing, and do it well.

More than that, the group which sponsors this viewpoint goes on, the idea of the community has always been over-exaggerated. Americans are a restless lot, always moving about. While the continent was being settled, people



moved on from county to county, from State to State, always to the West, always on the go. Nor is the situation different today, even though the migration to free land is over. Almost half of our farmers are tenants, few of whom stay on the same farm year after year, many of whom move to a new place each growing season. Special interests are about the only kinds of interests that transients have, insist the holders of this point of view, and since so many of our farm people are transients, why not recognize the fact in our social organization?

### HOW IMPORTANT IS COMMUNITY SPIRIT?

A third group thinks in terms of reorganization of some parts of rural life while maintaining the importance of the small community. This group says that to do away with communities in favor of special interest organizations would be to throw away the values and forces associated with tradition, custom, kinship, friendship, and community loyalty, all sources of power in getting people to work together.

They say that the people who think that Americans have to be on the move to be happy may be fair historians but they're poor prophets. They point to the recently enacted legislation to check the growth of tenancy in this country. Still more important, in their view, is a recent change of attitude which they think is rather general. They say that the closing of the frontier and the slackening of industrial expansion have presented the Americans of today with a new situation. The assumption that opportunity is to be found somewhere beyond the horizon is now acknowledged as a doubtful assumption. Ours is a period not of expansion but of consolidation. More and more people are looking at the national resources as a whole made up of local parts, one of which is their part, here and now. More and more people are trying to make plans with a view to permanence of location, with the idea of bringing up their children where they are and preparing them to carry on there when the parents are gone.

Because of this change of attitude, the third group continues, people are taking new interest in their local

communities. They are considering what their resources are, and what institutions it is important to build out of these resources. They are interested in making public policy for their locality; in coordinating local activities; in providing, as nearly as their means permit, the kind of environment which will give the fullest measure of opportunity to themselves and their children.

Still a further point made by the people who think community spirit is important concerns the economic side of life. They say, it's obvious that living in a rural community was no certain protection against the disasters of the recent depression—farm prices in fact fell lower than other prices. But on the other hand some rural communities seem to have unusual qualities and resources in meeting emergencies, and have gone far to compensate for the impersonality and weakened sense of social responsibility that has come with the machine age. The crowded Mormon communities of Utah, the Amish of Ohio, and the rocky New England communities have either had few government relief cases or have been the first to assume responsibility for their own relief families. The people who have been greatly impressed by the records of these communities believe that human sympathy for the welfare of other families can be maintained only by fairly frequent coming together, as neighbors do, in a mutual effort to care for common needs. Sympathy, they say, cannot grow from a one-sided relationship, or from a mechanical kind of service like that of some clerks whose only concern is to see that the customer gets just the amount of goods he bargained for, measured, wrapped, and delivered. Moreover, this group contends that only a frequent give-and-take relationship and a more complete sharing of hopes, fears, success, and failure, on a community basis, can insure the continuance of a functioning democracy in America.

#### WHAT ARE PRACTICAL MEANS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION?

A good many people are impressed by the statements of the group whose point of view has just been given. But after they think it over for a few minutes, they say, this

sounds all very fine, but how does a community come to have community spirit? Are there more rural communities in America whose members are connected with each other only by the ties of special interest, or are there more where there is a spirit of belonging together and sharing responsibility for the community's present and future good name? Are there a good many communities whose community spirit is limited to a pride in their history and has little to do with affairs of today? After bringing up such questions, these people say, can we be practical and get down to brass tacks on how a community's concerns can be handled so as to fill the greatest number of needs of its inhabitants?

### HOW CAN MODERN RURAL NEEDS BEST BE MET?

After this discussion of the effect of modern changes on rural communities and on the capacity of rural communities to meet rural needs, is it time to turn to the list of rural needs which the group made at the beginning of the meeting, and see which of these needs exist in the community, which are now being met, and how? Then the group would be in a good position to discuss ways of satisfying needs that are not now met, and improving methods of meeting needs that are already recognized.

Through what organizations do members of the farm families of your neighborhood meet their needs at present? Is yours one of the rural counties where organizations are few and far between? Or is yours one of the counties where farm families are lucky to have one free evening in the week to stay at home?

Are the organizations with most life and keenest membership in your area organizations like the grange that have been going a long time or are they those founded more recently? This generation has witnessed the advent in rural communities of 4-H Clubs, P. T. A.'s, Public Health units, Home Extension Councils, Farm Bureaus, co-operatives of all kinds, school basketball teams, orchestras, and other groups. Still more recently, organizations have been formed in connection with government agricultural programs, T. V. A., Rural Electrification, Farm Security,





Land Use, Soil Conservation, County Planning. The list could easily be extended further. How many of them are active in your neighborhood?

## IS AN ORGANIZATION DESIRABLE FOR MAKING COMMUNITY POLICY?

Is any special machinery required to hold community interests together? Is there any provision in your community for people doing the sort of thing this group has just been doing, that is to say, taking stock of community needs and existing ways of meeting them, and working out suggestions for the future? Clearly, some and perhaps the greater part of these needs cannot be met entirely by the community's own efforts. Equally clearly, if personal and local initiative and democracy are to continue in this country, provision for practically all of these needs must include a considerable measure of local responsibility.

## HOW CAN INDIVIDUALS POOL THEIR IDEAS?

Do you think the following story has an application in your neighborhood:

A man said to another man, "If you have a dollar and I have a dollar, and if I give you my dollar and you give me your dollar—well, each of us still has a dollar. But if you have an idea and I have an idea, and if you give me your idea and I give you my idea—well, each of us then has two ideas."

Many citizens of most communities will respond readily to the question, what does this community need most? They will start right off naming their most important needs—a swimming pool; a better market; a new schoolhouse; union of the Baptist and Methodist churches; a better public health service, and so on. But unless they get a chance to do more than mention these opinions to a friend or an inquiring stranger, nothing is likely to happen.

In view of this fact, more and more communities are attempting to provide channels for getting at community needs and desires. They are establishing community associations, community clubs, community councils. They are acquiring school buildings left idle by consolidation,

or building new community halls so that people may have a place to meet to discuss what they want to do, and a place where they can carry out the social and recreational part of their program.

Representation on some of these councils is by neighborhoods; on others, by organizations active in the area. Sometimes the county officials are included.

An Ohio rural community of about 1,800 citizens has developed a community council made up of representatives of organizations, elected officials, and representatives of neighborhoods. Only three regular stated meetings are held during the year, but there are many called meetings and especially many meetings of working committees. The most important thing about the council is the counciling. The council avoids administrative activities and aims primarily at being a clearing house for public opinion, a kind of discussion group or forum interested in studying and understanding community needs. A very comprehensive adult education and leisure time program comes under the guidance of committees of this council.

Some New England towns still preserve the direct democratic form of organization of the entire body of citizens as a whole. In Iowa the Township Farm Bureau is frequently the community organization that plans a yearly program of timely seasonal activities with a calendar devised to avoid conflict among the various local organizations. Can you describe other successful ventures in community organization?

### **WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO START A COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION?**

How does a community make a start toward some kind of organization that can grow into a self-directed instrument for coordinating activities into a balanced program of living? Perhaps this procedure should be thought of in terms of next steps, for every community is likely to be at a different stage of transition from a purely local neighborhood to an enlarged—not too large—modern rural community.

Can a start be made by talking the question over with a few friends, much as this group has done? How about



making a map of the general area, raising such questions as, What size tax duplicate is the right base for a community? Consider beginning with a study of needs; after discussing the goals of community life one group summarized its findings as follows:

1. An economic base of support.
2. A satisfying philosophy about living in a rural community.
3. Adequate local institutions to meet fundamental needs.
4. A management plan or form of organization as a means of coordinating the community's activities so as to serve the family at a minimum cost of time, money, and energy.
5. A continuing education program for all citizens of the community.

Does your study of needs give some points of departure for the first activities to be undertaken?

How about making a list of desirable programs, and a list of agencies already at work in the community? Would such lists in your community look at all like the following:

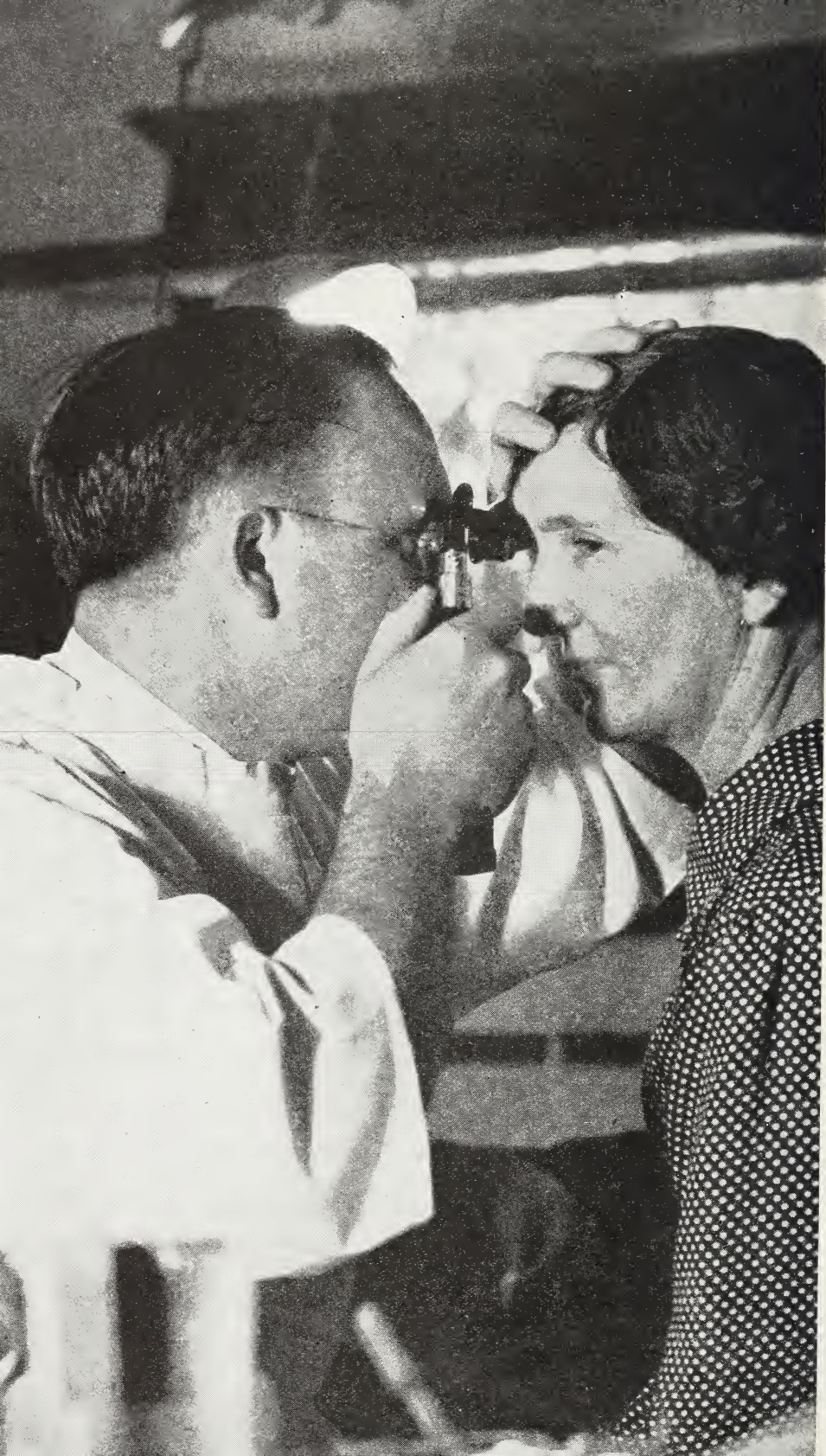
**Programs Needed:**

Economic  
Health  
Governmental  
Educational  
Social  
Spiritual

**Agencies at Work:**

School	Public Health
Church	Library
Government	Co-ops.
Lodges	4-H Clubs
Service Clubs	P. T. A.
Farm Organizations	

How many of these agencies can be brought to cooperate in working out a calendar of events for a season? Would it be a good plan to start the community program with one or a few activities that promise to find common agreement—how important is it to avoid moving ahead of the understanding of the general body of citizens? When a community council is first organized, there is always a possibility that friction may develop among the various organizations represented, involving questions of prestige, personalities of leaders, desire for publicity. Can the group that is fostering the council set an example by trying to avoid the limelight, play down its own leadership, and keep the purpose of community organization in the foreground? Would it be wise to do some preventive work by warning people against the development of friction before any concrete instance has appeared?





At the start, can people be brought to share the thrill of achievement through some activities that can be carried out in a relatively short time—Memorial Day, Play Day, Outdoor Vespers?

After the community has had some experience of doing things together about which there is not likely to be disagreement, how about holding some meetings on topics which are known to be lively issues? Would it be well to emphasize the fact that these are meetings in the nature of public hearings where the various sides are expected to be heard, so people will know in advance that there is going to be presentation and discussion of a variety of views? Is a chairman available who is level-headed and good-natured, able to help the speakers and the crowd to be likewise?

At the same time that arrangements are being made for forming community policy through public hearings, can work go forward to improve some of the local institutions? What about preventive health work? What about a recreation center? What about a county-wide plan for road improvement—does the State road authority now hear about county needs only piecemeal, as little delegations of householders go down to try to put on pressure? What should be the next step in an action program?

If some form of community organization is already active where you live, with what sorts of problems does it deal? Which of the following subjects do you think might interest citizens of your community as a topic for discussion with a view to action: a community library; marketing of the chief local farm products; rural electrification; improved school facilities or curriculum; medical service; a recreation program for various age groups? Are there other questions that might be more interesting? Which?

If there is no community organization where you live, do you think one would be useful? What form of representation would be most suitable to your particular circumstances? What type of program would be best as a starter? What additions to such a program do you think might be wise as next steps?



## MORE ABOUT RURAL COMMUNITIES

(Quantity Prices May Be Secured on Many of These Publications)

Publications on rural community life and problems, and handbooks for leaders interested in rural organization, are obtainable through the agricultural Extension Services of practically all States.

- HOSPITALS FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES. Farmers' Bulletin No. 1792. United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 1937. Free.
- COMMUNITY BUILDINGS FOR FARM FAMILIES. Farmers' Bulletin No. 1804. United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 1938. Free.
- RURAL LIBRARY SERVICE. Farmers' Bulletin No. 1847. United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 1940. Free.
- CHANGING RURAL AMERICA. F. L. Platt. Social Action, Vol. III, No. 11, June 1937. Social Action, 289 4th Ave., New York City. \$0.10.
- DOCTORS, DOLLARS, AND DISEASE. Public Affairs Committee, 8 W. 40th St., New York City. 1937. \$0.10.
- HEALTH SECURITY. T. Parran. Milbank Memorial Fund, 40 Wall St., New York City. 1936. \$0.05.
- RURAL MEDICAL SERVICE. American Medical Ass'n, 535 N. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill. 1937. \$0.15.
- ORGANIZATION OF MEDICAL SERVICES. American Medical Ass'n, 535 N. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill. 1937. \$0.15.
- ELECTRIC POWER ON THE FARM. D. C. Coyle. Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. 1937. \$0.25.
- DEMOCRACY IN DENMARK. J. Goldmark and A. H. Hollman. Nat'l Home Library Foundation, Washington, D. C. 1936. \$0.25.
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- CONSOLIDATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. B. Putney. Editorial Research Reports, 1013 13th St., Washington, D. C. 1937. \$0.50.
- GOVERNMENT AND EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION. American Council on Education, 744 Jackson Pl., Washington, D. C. 1937. \$0.25.
- FINANCING OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS. P. R. Mort and E. S. Lawler, American Ass'n of University Women, Washington, D. C. 1935. \$0.45.
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- THE RURAL CHURCH. Program Helps, Aug. 1934. Agricultural Extension Service, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. Free.
- HOW ST. F. X. UNIVERSITY EDUCATES FOR ACTION. The Cooperative League, New York City. 1935. \$0.20.
- DISCUSSION OUTLINES BASED ON "CONSUMER COOPERATION IN AMERICA." B. B. Fowler. Ohio Farm Bureau, 246 N. High St., Columbus, Ohio. 1937. \$0.10.
- THE EQUAL CHANCE: BOOKS HELP TO MAKE IT. American Library Ass'n, Chicago, Ill. 1936. \$0.25.
- YOUTH IN ACTION. Social Action. The Pilgrim Press, 289 4th Ave., New York City. 1937. \$0.10.
- LEISURE FOR LIVING. K. Glover. Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. 1936. \$0.15.
- OUR NEWEST PROBLEM—LEISURE. G. B. Cutten. American Education Press. 40 S. 3rd St., Columbus, Ohio. 1934. \$0.15.
- RECREATION: A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY WITH ANNOTATION. Recreation circular No. 2. Works Progress Administration. Washington, D. C. 1937. Free.
- THE FARMER'S FIVE-FOOT SHELF. Discussion Bibliography No. I, R. S. 26, New Jersey State College of Agriculture, New Brunswick, N. J. 1937. Free.